

“The Stone the Builders Rejected”

Liturgical and Exegetical Irrelevancies in the Piacenza Pilgrim

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The formation of the geographical imagination in late antiquity coincides with an apparent boom in Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land beginning during the sole reign of Constantine I (324–337).¹ The first

surviving account of such a pilgrimage is the *Bordeaux Pilgrim* from 333, a text that follows the Roman itinerary genre closely, while incorporating numerous sites of Christian devotion, stemming mostly from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.² The most famous late antique pilgrimage to the Holy Land comes from the latter half of the fourth century, 381 to 384. This is the account of Egeria, a woman from southern France or northern Spain, who left a lengthy record of her journey, including an important account of Jerusalem during Easter Week.³ While one might reasonably ask how representative she was of her own time, Egeria’s invaluable narrative testifies to the potentiality of a much larger pilgrimage circuit fifty years after Constantine, which could include not just Jerusalem but also Sinai and Egypt, Edessa in Mesopotamia, and nascent shrines in the new Roman capital of Constantinople.⁴ Clearly

1 J. Elsner, “The *Itinerarium Burdigalense*: Politics and Salvation in the Geography of Constantine’s Empire,” *JRS* 90 (2000): 181–95 remains a fundamental study of the emergent Christian Roman empire in light of pilgrimage. See also, more generally, R.A. Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places,” *JECrSt* 2 (1994): 257–71; D. French, “Mapping Sacred Centers: Pilgrimage and the Creation of Christian Topographies in Roman Palestine,” in *Akten des XII. Internationalen Kongresses für christliche Archäologie (Bonn, 22–28 September 1991)*, ed. E. Dassmann and J. Engemann, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 20 (Münster and Vatican City, 1995), 792–97; G. Bowman, “Pilgrim Narratives of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: A Study in Ideological Distortion,” in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. E. A. Morinis, *Contributions to the Study of Anthropology* 7 (Westport, CT, 1992), 149–68; idem, “Mapping History’s Redemption: Eschatology and Topography in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*,” in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. L. Levine (New York, 1999), 163–87; S. Coleman and J. Elsner, *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), 78–99; and O. Grabar, “Space and Holiness in Medieval Jerusalem,” in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. L. Levine (New York, 1999), 275–86. Maurice Halbwachs’s famous study *On Collective Memory*, trans. L. A. Coser (Chicago, 1992), is fundamental in a theoretical sense, and has influenced several others working in this field, such as B. Leyerle, “Landscape as Cartography in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64 (1996): 119–43, and B. Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2005). I engage the

scholarship on Christian pilgrimage in more detail in S. F. Johnson, *Literary Territories: Cartographical Thinking in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2016).

2 P. Geyer, O. Cuntz, et al., eds., *Itineraria et Alia Geographica*, 2 vols., CCL 175–76 (Turnhout, 1965), 1–26.

3 P. Maraval, ed., *Égérie, journal de voyage: Itinéraire*, 2nd ed., SC 296 (Paris, 2002), and Geyer, Cuntz, et al., *Itineraria*, 29–90. On Egeria’s background and identification, see H. Sivan, “Holy Land Pilgrimage and Western Audiences: Some Reflections on Egeria and Her Circle,” *CQ* 38 (1988): 528–35, and eadem, “Who Was Egeria? Piety and Pilgrimage in the Age of Gratian,” *HTR* 81 (1988): 59–72.

4 On the absence of Constantinople in the *Bordeaux Pilgrim*, see B. Salway, “There but Not There: Constantinople in the *Itinerarium*

pilgrimage was big business, but not only that: it had also expanded, in a short time, the range of possible Christian experiences and texts produced in situ in the late Roman Near East.

Eight independent pilgrimage accounts, including the *Bordeaux Pilgrim* and Egeria's text, survive in Latin from late antiquity.⁵ In this article, I would like to consider one of these precious accounts which has to date been overlooked or dismissed, unfairly in my view, in relation to the formation of the Christian Holy Land in late antiquity. This account is anonymous and is normally called today the "Piacenza Pilgrim" (*Antonini Placentini itinerarium*), because its author and his companions—one of whom, John, died along the route—began their journey from their home city of Piacenza (*Placentia*). The account dates to around 570 CE and represents one man's vision of the late antique Holy Land.⁶ What makes this particular text challenging for the modern historian is that the Piacenza Pilgrim, in the process of visiting the venerated sites of his day, seems to have misunderstood, from a modern perspective, both what was being physically shown to him and the traditions (scriptural or otherwise) that established the fame of the sites. The activities he undertakes and

describes for his readers represent attempts to link these two areas of misunderstanding—the physical and the textual, the real and the imagined.⁷ As I will show, he tries to align objects and texts by performing otherwise unattested acts of religious devotion. It is precisely because of his apparently eccentric behavior that the Piacenza Pilgrim has often been read as a simpleton, bumbling through significant situations without the slightest idea of why they are significant.⁸

However, his eccentricity is exactly what makes the Piacenza Pilgrim so valuable for the study of the sixth-century Mediterranean. The many seemingly irrelevant observations he makes, while easy to dismiss as idiotic, reveal how the Christian Holy Land, even 250 years after Constantine, was still open to interpretation and redefinition. The Pilgrim gives us a window on the *in medias res* historical development of late antique Jerusalem and the other sites he visits.⁹ On one hand, his account gives the impression that the Holy Land had become by the late sixth century something

Burdigalense," in *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. Grig and G. Kelly (Oxford, 2012), 293–324.

5 All conveniently edited together (with other texts) in Geyer, Cuntz, et al., *Itineraria*. These accounts are: the *Bordeaux Pilgrim* (333), Egeria (381–384), the *Breviary of Jerusalem* (ca. 400), ps.-Eucherius's *De situ Hierusolymae* (ca. 440), Theodosius's *De situ terrae sanctae* (ca. 518), the *Piacenza Pilgrim* (ca. 570), Adomnán's *De locis sanctis* (before 683), and Willibald of Eichstätt's *Hodoiporicon* (ca. 787). Willibald's text is not in the CCSL volume, but can be found as part of Willibald's *Vita* (BHL 8931) in O. Holder-Egger, ed., "Vitae Willibaldi et Wynnebaldi auctore sanctimoniali Heidenheimensi," in *MGH ScriptRerGerm* 15.1 (Hanover, 1887), 80–117. Only one related Greek text survives from the period, that of Epiphanius Hagiopolites from around 800 (see A. Külzer, *Peregrinatio graeca in terram sanctam: Studien zu Pilgerführern und Reisebeschreibungen über Syrien, Palästina und den Sinai aus byzantinischer und metabyzantinischer Zeit*, Studien und Texte zur Byzantinistik 2 [Frankfurt, 1994], 14–17). And there are no independent Syriac, Armenian, or Coptic texts that I am aware of. Itinerary-style digressions sometimes appear in contemporary hagiographical and historiographical texts (e.g., the Syriac *Life of Peter the Iberian*). On the genres of travel literature Byzantium, see M. Mullett, "Travel Genres and the Unexpected," in *Travel in Byzantium*, ed. R. Macrides, SPBS 10 (Aldershot, 2002), 259–84.

6 C. Milani, ed., *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini: Un viaggio in Terra Santa del 560–570 d.C.*, Scienze filologiche e letteratura 7 (Milan, 1977), and Geyer, Cuntz, et al., *Itineraria*, 129–53.

7 I have tried to address the relation of real and imagined geography in separate studies: S. F. Johnson, "Real and Imagined Geography," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge, 2014), 394–413, and idem, *Literary Territories* (n. 1 above), 29–60.

8 Notable exceptions to the standard dismissal of the Piacenza Pilgrim are G. F. M. Vermeer, *Observations sur le vocabulaire du pèlerinage chez Égérie et chez Antonin de Plaisance* (Nijmegen, 1965), and C. Arias Abellán, *Itinerarios latinos a Jerusalén y al oriente cristiano: Egeria y el Pseudo-Antonio de Piacenza* (Seville, 2000), comparing his language to Egeria (see also L. Spitzer, "The Epic Style of the Pilgrim Aetheria," *Comparative Literature* 1 [1949]: 225–58, and V. Väinänen, *Le journal-épître d'Égérie [Itinerarium Egeriae]: Étude linguistique* [Helsinki, 1987]). See also Leyerle, "Landscape as Cartography" (n. 1 above), and R. Avner, "The Account of Caesarea by the Piacenza Pilgrim and the Recent Archaeological Discovery of the Octagonal Church in Caesarea Maritima," *PEQ* 140 (2008): 203–12, on his value for the archaeology of the octagonal church in Caesarea Maritima. It is conceivable that the Piacenza Pilgrim had been trained to view *miracula* in the West through an emergent pilgrimage network to Rome and elsewhere, and thus different patterns of pilgrim behavior account for his eccentricity. However, there is no clear evidence in the text that he participated in western pilgrimage networks.

9 As a corollary to this, the Piacenza Pilgrim can help to interpret other geographical literature from the period. For an example of this type of triangulation of geographical sources, see L. Di Segni, "The 'Onomasticon' of Eusebius and the Madaba Map," in *The Madaba Map Centenary, 1897–1997: Travelling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period*, ed. M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (Jerusalem, 1998), 115–20.

akin to a Christian theme park.¹⁰ Yet, on the other hand, he attests better than any other source the fluid patterns of pilgrimage in this period.¹¹

Because these pilgrimage accounts are simultaneously scarce and compelling, they tend to dominate studies of the late antique Holy Land, not to mention the study of travel and the circulation of people, goods, and ideas in late antiquity more generally. It is imperative that we endeavor to understand them on their own terms and allow them to reform our ideas of what the early Christian Holy Land looked like.¹² We need to resist the temptation to conflate these accounts with more familiar medieval and early modern traditions, such as the venerable pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Indeed, one criticism often leveled at Victor Turner's well-known formulation of *communitas* in pilgrimage contexts is that it presumes static categories or genres of pilgrimage and tends to read high medieval pilgrimage back onto the early pilgrimage accounts.¹³

Modern theoretical approaches to Christian pilgrimage have emphasized the "antistructural" and

"liberating" elements of the pilgrim's experience over and against established structures of the church.¹⁴ This "voluntary liminality" produces new meanings in response to hierarchical or exclusionary institutions and allows pilgrims to claim for themselves new roles, often in the absence of financial, social, or other kinds of societal power.¹⁵ Pilgrimage can even be a kind of exteriorized mysticism, in which ascent to the divine without intermediation is played out in physical form.¹⁶ This exteriorized ascent is, however, not necessarily place-centered, even as it is also not merely a habit of mind.¹⁷ Moreover, pilgrimage does not have to be an unusual occurrence, but can be a normal mode of participation in a religious community, a recent self-criticism among anthropologists who have traditionally avoided pilgrimage because it was seen as anomalous in religious systems.¹⁸ Instead, the awareness of "mobility" has come to the fore as constituent of many religions, especially in its reflexive expressions "to, at, and from" the pilgrimage site.¹⁹ The sites themselves are complex, but the interaction of the varied forms of pilgrimage at any given site—not to mention the meanings individuals may derive from the sites—reveals a further complexity that proves very difficult to assess as a whole. The result is that no satisfactorily uniform definition of pilgrimage has emerged among scholars, and pilgrimage itself has become defined partly by the conflict of discourses surrounding centers and practices of sanctity and devotion.²⁰

The decentered nature of pilgrimage, from a modern anthropological viewpoint, is made even more complex when one tries to assess the earliest, fragmentary period of Christian pilgrimage. Pilgrimage in late antiquity was distinct from both its classical precedents and its medieval successors, so *comparanda* are difficult to find.²¹ Moreover, the surviving narratives vary

10 The term "Disneyfication" has been used to describe the inevitable proliferation of attractions at pilgrimage sites: J. Eade and M. J. Sallnow, eds., *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, new ed. (Urbana, 2000), xxiii. On modern theme parks that attempt to replicate the Holy Land in different contexts, see A. J. Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago, 2006). See also the stimulating articles in B. Kühnel, G. Noga-Banai, and H. Vorholt, eds., *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 18 (Turnhout, 2014).

11 This fluidity is important to understanding how monumentalized and institutionalized, largely with imperial oversight, the Holy Land had become by this time, especially under Justinian in the preceding generation. See the classic study of E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312–460* (Oxford, 1982); and for Jerusalem in the age of Justinian, Y. Tsafrir, "The Maps Used by Theodosius: On the Pilgrim Maps of the Holy Land and Jerusalem in the Sixth Century CE," *DOP* 40 (1986): 129–45, and idem, "Procopius and the Nea Church in Jerusalem," *Antiquité Tardive* 8 (2001): 149–64.

12 A pioneering study in this vein is Leyerle, "Landscape as Cartography" (n. 1 above). See also O. Limor, "Holy Journey: Pilgrimage and Christian Sacred Landscape," in *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms*, ed. O. Limor and G. Stroumsa, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 5 (Turnhout, 2006), 321–53.

13 See the helpful problematizations of his model in Eade and Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred* (n. 10 above) and S. Coleman and J. Eade, eds., *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London, 2004).

14 V. W. Turner and E. L. B. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, Lectures on the History of Religions 11 (New York, 1978), xiii, 9.

15 Ibid., 9.

16 Ibid., 7, 33.

17 Coleman and Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage*, 2.

18 Ibid., 3, 5, 10.

19 Ibid., 3, 16–18.

20 Eade and Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred*, xiii, 26.

21 J. Elsner and Ian Rutherford, eds., *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford, 2005)

greatly between individual pilgrims: no single model can satisfactorily account for all of the phenomena.²² The differences between the surviving pilgrims are notoriously hard to interpret. For many scholars, the Piacenza Pilgrim's bumbblings stand in stark contrast to Egeria, who routinely receives praise for the completeness of her narrative and for her savvy observations.²³ Yet, even if we all agree that the Piacenza Pilgrim narrative is offbeat, the important question remains: what is the significance of his difference? Why does he seem out of sync with other late antique pilgrims? Why, one might ask, is there no clear linear development of pilgrimage in late antiquity?

I think the answers to these questions lay partly within a larger discussion of how the Piacenza Pilgrim read the Bible. Post-Justinianic biblical interpretation was not just a dogmatic tool in the hands of theologians; it could still be employed ad hoc by Christians attempting to fill in the gaps of their own biblical imagination. The Piacenza Pilgrim, for instance, recounts the story about Jesus learning his ABCs with other children in a synagogue in Nazareth. Prior to his account, that story shows up only in the rather different *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, an apocryphal text dating to the third century, which it is unlikely the Piacenza Pilgrim knew.²⁴ While it is not my purpose here to excavate the origins of odd stories and traditions appearing in the Piacenza

Pilgrim, I nevertheless want to emphasize that the literary mode of pilgrimage literature is not dissimilar to that of Christian apocrypha (that is, fictional tales not in the Bible that describe the “wild West” experiences of Jesus, Mary, and the Apostles).²⁵ These highly varied texts imaginatively enlarged the “known world” of biblical narrative.²⁶ In an analogous manner, pilgrim accounts capitalized on the historical interaction between real and imagined geographies and produced new trajectories for understanding biblical narrative.

Moreover, casting a large shadow in the background of these pilgrimage texts is the institutionalized worship of the Christian East.²⁷ How those emergent habits of worship could still be challenged in late antiquity is an important subject demanding further study. I use the word *liturgy* below to stand in for formalized acts of devotion in sacred contexts. Because the Piacenza Pilgrim forgoes such acts, at least as they are known to us today, one might reasonably argue that he subverts the ecclesiastical hierarchy in favor of his own, highly personal experiences. This would align with the way Turner and others have framed pilgrimage as “anti-structural.” However, I would like to leave room for the Pilgrim's peculiar devotional acts to be liturgical in

makes bold and salutary arguments for at least attempting to read ancient, late antique, and medieval pilgrimage as of a piece.

22 On this point, see Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred* (n. 1 above); and M. Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300–800* (University Park, PA, 2005).

23 See M. Johnson, “Reconciling Cyril and Egeria on the Catechetical Process in Fourth-Century Jerusalem,” in *Essays in Eastern Initiation*, ed. P. F. Bradshaw (Nottingham, 1988), 18–30. For the rhetoric of accuracy in modern scholarship, particularly in relation to Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*, see T. O'Loughlin, *Adomnán and the Holy Places: The Perceptions of an Insular Monk on the Locations of the Biblical Drama* (London, 2007), and R. Hoyland and S. Waidler, “Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* and the Seventh-Century Near East,” *EHR* 129 (2014): 787–807.

24 *Antonini Placentini itinerarium* 5 (Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 100); *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (J. K. Elliott, ed. and trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, rev. ed. [Oxford, 2005], 75–83). On the infancy narratives of Jesus generally, see S. J. Davis, *Christ Child: Cultural Memories of a Young Jesus*, *Synkrisis: Comparative Approaches to Early Christianity in Greco-Roman Culture* (New Haven, 2014).

25 On the definition of *apocrypha*, both in antiquity and today, see F. Bovon, “Beyond the Canonical and the Apocryphal Books, the Presence of a Third Category: The Books Useful for the Soul,” *HTR* 105 (2012): 125–37; S. J. Shoemaker, “Early Christian Apocryphal Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. S. A. Harvey and D. G. Hunter (Oxford, 2008), 521–48; and S. F. Johnson, “Christian Apocrypha,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic*, ed. W. Johnson and D. Richter (Oxford, forthcoming).

26 A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley, 1991), 89–119; S. F. Johnson, “Apocrypha and the Literary Past in Late Antiquity,” in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honor of Averil Cameron*, ed. H. Amirav and B. ter Haar Romeny (Leuven, 2007), 47–66; and idem, “Reviving the Memory of the Apostles: Apocryphal Tradition and Travel Literature in Late Antiquity,” in *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, ed. K. Cooper and J. Gregory, *Studies in Church History* 44 (Woodbridge, 2008), 1–26.

27 See P. F. Bradshaw, “The Influence of Jerusalem on Christian Liturgy,” in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. L. Levine (New York, 1999), 251–59. On the development of liturgy in eastern Christianity generally, see now B. Groen, D. Galadza, N. Glibet, and G. Radle, eds., *Rites and Rituals of the Christian East: Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, Lebanon, 10–15 July 2012*, *Eastern Christian Studies* 22 (Leuven, 2014).

their own right, that is, apart from organized worship yet not antagonistic toward it. My point is to emphasize that what counted as liturgy at this time was still fluid, and perhaps the Piacenza Pilgrim's "irrelevancies" should, instead, be considered relevant to our reconstruction of the liturgical landscape of late antiquity.

The devotional actions I discuss below all take place at the center of a volatile combination of text and object. I argue that the objects the Piacenza Pilgrim describes have a marked tendency to overwhelm his textual rooting of them. The scriptural text is almost always present but, as a technology of interpretation, it is unable to satisfy the intense physical encounters that are driving his account. From this point of view, I adduce in the conclusion recent art historical work on late antique and Byzantine objects that takes seriously the unpredictable nature of encounters with Christian materiality, both in the period and today.²⁸ A recent article by Glenn Peers has provided a manifesto for the type of reinterpretation I attempt in this article:

Objects had venerable models for acting out. That ability was always latent, but *things* did such work frequently. Scholars have often tried to explain away these aspects of objects' work in Byzantium, by ascribing any mention of such work in the sources as superstition or textual error. Both cases, then, are not relevant or true for explaining any significant aspect of that culture, since those ascriptions *infantilize* human reactions to objects in Byzantium, or privilege accidents of preservation and transmission over real human knowledge of the world those people lived in.²⁹

To do justice to the Piacenza Pilgrim's account as it survives, we should resist the temptation to infantilize him. Rather we should attempt to take seriously his own responses to objects and, especially, his fascination

with the material over the textual. These objects come alive in a way that is uncomfortable for historians, but our discomfort, I suggest, stems from what we perceive to be his misinterpretation of the texts he applies and the seemingly irrelevant manner in which he applies them. But the question remains: irrelevant to what? His irrelevancies are significant, and their strangeness should provoke us to recondition our own expectations of what mental, emotional, and religious experiences were available to Christian pilgrims in the sixth century.



I would like to begin with a passage from the Jerusalem section of the Piacenza Pilgrim that inspired the title of the present article:³⁰

Deinde uenimus in bas[il]ica sancti Sion, ubi sunt multe mirabiliae, inter quibus quod legitur de lapide angulare, que reprobatus est ab aedificantibus.³¹ Ingresso domino Iesu in ipsa aeclasia, quae fuit domus sancti Iacobi, invenit lapidem istum deformae in medio iacentem, tenuit eum et posuit in angulum. Quem tenes et leuas in manibus tuis et ponis aurem in ipso angulo et sonat in auribus tuis quasi multorum hominum murmorantia.

Then we came to the basilica of Holy Sion, where there are many wondrous things. Among

30 *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 22.1–3 (Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 156). When quoting the Latin text of the Piacenza Pilgrim, I follow, where available, Milani's diplomatic edition of Sangallensis 133 (8th–9th cent.), which is the earliest surviving manuscript and which offers the most interesting orthography.

31 Ps. 118:22–23; Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:4–8 (R. Weber, B. Fischer, and R. Gryson, eds., *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem* [Stuttgart, 2007]): "Ad quem [Dominum] accedentes lapidem vivum ab hominibus quidem reprobatum a Deo autem electum honorificatum. Et ipsi tamquam lapides vivi supraedificamini domus spiritalis sacerdotium sanctum offerre spiritales hostias acceptabiles Deo per Iesum Christum. Propter quod continet in scriptura, 'Ecce pono in Sion lapidem summum angularem electum pretiosum et qui crediderit in eo non confundetur.' Vobis igitur honor credentibus non credentibus autem, 'Lapis quem reprobaverunt aedificantes hic factus est in caput anguli.' Et 'Lapis offensionis et petra scandali,' qui offendunt verbo nec credunt in quod et positi sunt."

28 The topic of Christian materiality, particularly its relationship to theologies of the Incarnation, is currently in vogue: see C. W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York, 2011).

29 Emphasis is mine. G. Peers, "Transfiguring Materialities: Relational Abstraction in Byzantium and Its Exhibition," *Seminarium Kondakovianum Series Nova; Convivium: Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean* 2.2 (2015): 122.

these is the cornerstone about which one reads, “the stone that the builders rejected.”³² When the Lord Jesus went into this church, which was the house of Saint James, he found this stone, misshapen and cast aside. He picked it up and placed it into the corner. [Today] when you pick up the rock and lift it [out of its place] with your hands and put your ear to the corner [of the church], it makes a sound in your ears like the murmuring of many men.³³

Despite its odd Latin and simple style, this is a remarkable passage. As in other vignettes, the author starts with the site and with his visit to the modern building (here, the basilica); he then mentions an object of consequence or veneration in that place and immediately quotes the biblical text that justifies his interest in it. In this case, he next shifts back to Jesus’s day and paints a picture of his action, that is, placing the stone (an action that does not occur in the Gospels, of course). The pilgrim then returns to his present-day interaction with the object and closes the section. Not unlike a children’s science museum today, he explains to his readers how one is supposed to use the holy apparatus—truly a “hands-on” exhibit.

However, you can see that this vignette goes beyond the merely tactile—yes, the rock is in situ and pilgrims readily handle it, but the whole concept of “the stone the builders rejected” being a real, matter-of-fact stone should be arresting to anyone familiar with the biblical text. It is a bizarre appropriation of the verse. In the Gospels, Jesus uses Psalm 118 (117 LXX) to refer to himself, to the idea that, contrary to the expectations of his disciples and the crowds who welcome him into Jerusalem, his version of messiahship is not kingly triumph, but humility, rejection, and death. Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the verse does not occur in John) connect this Messianic Psalm to Jesus’s view of the Temple and to his confrontation with the Temple hierarchy.³⁴

32 Lit. “Among these is that which one reads about the cornerstone, which was rejected by the builders.”

33 All translations in this article are my own, unless otherwise noted.

34 Matt. 21:23ff.; Mark 11:27ff.; Luke 20:1ff. Significantly, the author of Luke–Acts, writing most likely after the destruction of the Temple, uses this quotation twice, once in the mouth of Jesus in Luke 20, once in Peter’s speech before the high priest and elders of the Temple in Acts 4.

In that regard it is also an apocalyptic statement, since, in the same discourse, Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple.³⁵

One well-studied phenomenon of late antiquity is the growth of anti-Jewish sentiment, especially in the eastern Mediterranean. Christian leaders often sought to deny Jewish claims in the Holy Land and elsewhere through textual polemic—texts as weapons, dueling interpretative strategies.³⁶ We see this phenomenon on display here: the overtone of this entire passage is anti-Jewish, and this is not just because the Gospel text that is being alluded to deals with Jesus’s conflict with the Temple hierarchy. The Piacenza Pilgrim takes pains to highlight this conflict. The site itself is “Sion,” that is, the dwelling place of the king of Israel and a metaphor for the whole of God’s people. Topographically, however, what is meant here is the Christian Mount Sion in the southwest corner of the city and not the original, Davidic Mount Sion in the southeast corner of the city, nor the new Zion, which under Solomon became the Temple Mount.³⁷ Christian Mount Sion is a site revered for, among other things, the Tomb of David (cf. 1 Kings 2:10, Acts 2:29), the Last Supper (in the Upper Room or “Cenacle” [*cenaculum*]; cf. Mark 14:15, Luke 22:12, Acts 1:13), the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1–4), and the death of the Virgin Mary.³⁸

35 The passage occurs shortly before Jesus’s apocalyptic discourses in each of the synoptics (Matt. 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6). On this site and its eschatological significance, see O. Limor, “The Place of the End of Days: Eschatological Geography in Jerusalem,” *Jewish Art* 23–24 (1997–98): 13–24; and eadem, “Pilgrims and Authors: Adomnán’s *De locis sanctis* and Huguéburc’s *Hodoeporicon Sancti Willibaldi*,” *RBén* 114 (2004): 253–75.

36 A. Cameron, “Texts as Weapons: Polemic in the Byzantine Dark Ages,” in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. A. K. Bowman and G. Woolf (Cambridge, 1994), 198–215.

37 Annabel Wharton has studied this “migration” of the site in depth, including its resonance in modern controversies concerning ownership and worship: A. J. Wharton, “Jerusalem’s Zions,” *Material Religion* 9 (2013): 218–43.

38 Cyril of Jerusalem (sed. 350–86) knew the tradition of associating Pentecost with the site and calls the building there “the Upper Church of the Apostles” (Wharton, “Jerusalem’s Zions,” 223). On this site, see also J. Murphy-O’Connor, “The Cenacle and the Community: The Background of Acts 2:44–45,” in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. M. D. Coogan, J. C. Exum, and L. E. Stager (Louisville, KY, 1994), 296–310; and L. Perrone, “‘Rejoice Sion, Mother of All Churches’: Christianity in the Holy Land during the Byzantine Era,”

The Piacenza Pilgrim notes that the basilica itself was originally the "house" (*domus*) of James. James the brother of Jesus was remembered among early Christians as being the first leader of the Christian church in Jerusalem and a mediator between the Gentile and Jewish factions at the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15.³⁹ The Jewish historian Josephus claims that James was martyred by stoning at the Temple, just before 70 CE, at the hands of the Jews, and then buried on the very spot.⁴⁰ Thus, the *domus* of James could possibly be translated as his "tomb," though it is clear that by the late fourth century the episcopal throne of James was on display in the basilica and his tomb was just east of the Temple Mount.⁴¹ In existence from at least 333 CE, the Christian basilica of Sion was conflated with biblical Sion from an early point, leading to the transfer of the earliest, first-century traditions surrounding the martyrdom and burial of James from Solomon's Temple to the basilica.⁴² A new, larger ecclesiastical complex enveloped the site in the late fourth or

early fifth century so that, by the time of the Piacenza Pilgrim's travels, the church held a celebrated memory in the minds of both local Christians and pilgrims.⁴³ In the Christian Roman empire, this Mount Sion was thus not only the fountainhead of the early church, but, when identified with the Temple, also a definitive sign of the permanent replacement of Judaism with Christianity.

Indeed, this line of argument can be taken further. The Latin word that closes the whole passage, *murmorantia* (more properly, *murmuratio*), I am inclined to translate with the English cognate "murmuring." Surely, the Piacenza Pilgrim's use of the word conjures the language and drama of the Jews "murmuring" against Jesus in the Gospels.⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, the Piacenza Pilgrim is claiming that Jesus was a source of chagrin for the Jews. More specifically, the Temple, once destroyed, has now been rebuilt and is the Christian basilica of Sion. This is a prestige site, and its stature only increases through the localization of the memory of James the brother of Jesus, the founder of the Jerusalem church and a martyr at the hands of the Jews. On this reading, therefore, *murmorantia* is not a throwaway word—as if it were merely an acoustic trick, like holding a conch shell up to your ear⁴⁵—but it is specifically the murmuring of the Jews against the Christians.⁴⁶ To that extent we could argue that this

in *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 5 (Turnhout, 2006), 141–73. The pilgrim Willibald of Eichstätt in the eighth century knew this site only as the place of the Virgin Mary's Assumption (R. Aist, *The Christian Topography of Early Islamic Jerusalem: The Evidence of Willibald of Eichstätt, 700–787 CE* [Turnhout, 2009], 147). The basilica mentioned here, of which very little remains archaeologically, was referenced in the fifth-century topographical *breviarium* attributed to a Theodosius as "Holy Mt. Zion, the Mother of All Churches" (Theodosius, *De terra sancta* 7 [Geyer, Cuntz, et al., *Itineraria*]). On Theodosius, see Tsafir, "The Maps Used by Theodosius" (n. 11 above). For a reconstruction of the early Byzantine church on the basis of a miniature in the Chludov Psalter (9th–10th cent.), see Wharton, "Jerusalem's Zions" (n. 37 above), 225–27.

39 Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:28; cf. Matt. 13:55. He was often called "James the Less" or "James the Just" to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee. Paul called this James a "pillar" of the church, and considered him an apostle by virtue of having seen the risen Jesus (Gal. 1:19, 2:9, 1 Cor. 15:7). See B. Chilton and C. A. Evans, eds., *James the Just and Christian Origins*, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum* 98 (Leiden, 1999).

40 Josephus *Antiquities* 20.200; Eusebius *HE* 2.23.4–18 (via Hegesippus making use of a lost Ebionite Acts of the Apostles).

41 There is a second-century house-church under the basilica, though it is unclear whether the Piacenza Pilgrim could have known that. See A. Cain, *Jerome's Epitaph on Paula: A Commentary on the Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae with an Introduction, Text, and Translation*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford, 2013), 238.

42 Wharton argues that this "slippage" of the name Sion from the Temple to the southwest corner of the city had already occurred

before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE: see Wharton, "Jerusalem's Zions" (n. 37 above), 220–21.

43 Ibid., 223–24.

44 In Vulgate Luke 5:30, John 6:41–43, and elsewhere, *murmuro* translates γογγύζω, and the Jews are the subject of the verb. In John 6:61, and elsewhere, the disciples are the subject of the verb. The verb is used of the Israelites in the desert in the LXX at Ex. 17:3, Num. 11:1, 14:27–29.

45 The Piacenza Pilgrim is not averse to *paradoxa* (natural wonders) or superstitions; e.g., *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 3 (Geyer, Cuntz, et al., *Itineraria*, 130): "In Carmelo monte inuenitur petra modica rotunda, quam dum exagitas sonat, quae solida est. Talis autem est uirtus petrae: si suspensa fuerit mulieri uel cuicumque animali, iactum numquam faciet," = "On Mount Carmel is a small round rock, which makes a noise when you shake it, even though it is solid. Moreover, the power of the rock is such that if it is fixed to a woman or some animal, she will never miscarry."

46 This reading fits with Andrew Jacobs's postcolonialist argument about the writing-out of the Other—the Jews—in Christian pilgrimage narratives, even though Jacobs does not discuss this passage specifically (see further below). On the Christianizing of the Jewish Holy Land in late antiquity, see, more generally, R. L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New

passage fits into a larger Christian-imperial replacement theology and follows accepted patterns of pilgrimage narratives going back to the *Bordeaux Pilgrim*.

However, it is important to emphasize that this claim is made not in a spiritual or notional manner—as the Psalm is reinterpreted Messianically in the Gospels—but in a physically metonymic or tokened manner. The cornerstone is bottling up, or silencing, the complaints of the Jews, which the Pilgrim claims can still be heard if you listen carefully to the corner of the basilica on Sion. That murmuring has been contained, but can be accessed in the very sound, the murmuratio, coming from the corner of the basilica. Through the stone—based on a misunderstanding of the Gospel text, stripped of its context—the Piacenza Pilgrim is bringing the biblical past into the late antique present. Furthermore, I would suggest this is a liturgical action. Even if these acts cannot be connected directly to the formal Jerusalem liturgy known from the period and later, I think we can safely assume that the Pilgrim is performing these actions in the manner of liturgical celebrations: similarities can be found in the types of performance (eating, drinking, changes of posture, recitations, observation) as well as in the Latin words he uses (*adoravimus, benedictiones*, etc.).⁴⁷ The biblical past has an immediacy that is vividly conjured through the material objects the pilgrim is interacting with on the ground.

Clearly the Pilgrim is using the technology of Scripture to make sense of an intense physical encounter he had on Mount Sion, but Scripture is not able to do everything he wants it to: it lags behind his liturgical experience. On this point, a similar passage appears

earlier in his narrative, when he visits Mount Tabor in southern Galilee:⁴⁸

De Nazaret venimus in Tabor monte, qui mons exivit in medio campestre, terram uiuam, tenens in circuitu milia sex, ascensum contra unum miliario planus. In quo sunt tres basilicas, ubi Petrus dixit ad Dominum: “Faciamus hic tria tapernacula.”⁴⁹ In circuitu diuerse ciuitates, quae leguntur in l[ibr]o Regum.

From Nazareth we came to Mount Tabor, which is a mountain that rises in the middle of a plain. Its soil is fertile. The circumference of its base measures six miles. At the summit there is a plateau for about one mile. There are three basilicas on this spot, where Peter said to the Lord, “Let us make here three tabernacles.” In the region are various cities which are mentioned in the Book of Kings.

In the Gospels, when Peter, James, and John see Jesus transfigured into a spiritual being of light suspended in the air between Moses and Elijah, Peter eagerly offers to make three tabernacles or tents for the three refulgent figures. However, his suggestion does not go over well. The Gospels of Mark and Luke both explicitly say Peter made the suggestion out of ignorance and fear, and he makes no further offer after God speaks from the cloud. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all depict Peter, James, and John falling on their faces in awe at the sight of the Transfiguration and at the sound of God’s voice.

The Piacenza Pilgrim, however, sees no discrepancy in identifying the three basilicas at the top of Mount Tabor with the three tabernacles Peter offered to build. How do we reconcile his interpretation with the thrust of the biblical text? One option is that he is reporting how guides or priests at the site identified it, without any attempt to qualify or correct their story. Alternatively, he may have read or heard the text of Peter’s offer of three tabernacles but did not understand the point of the Gospel narrative. A third option, in line with my interpretation above, is that these three churches take on a living presence, as objects, through

Haven, 1992); J. E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford, 1993); J. Wilkinson, “Christian Pilgrimage in Jerusalem during the Byzantine Period,” *PEQ* 108 (1976): 75–101; and O. Irshai, “The Christian Appropriation of the Holy Land: The Case of the Bordeaux Pilgrim,” *JQR* 99 (2009): 465–86.

47 On the Holy Land liturgies that changed form and language depending on the congregation, see J. Elsner, “Piety and Passion: Contest and Consensus in the Audiences for Early Christian Pilgrimage,” in *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*, ed. J. Elsner and I. Rutherford (Oxford, 2005), 413–34; and S. F. Johnson, “Introduction: The Social Presence of Greek in Eastern Christianity, 200–1200 CE,” in *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Greek, The Worlds of Eastern Christianity, 300–1500*, 6 (Farnham, 2015), 4–7.

48 *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 6.1–3 (Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 104).

49 Matt. 17:4; Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33.

the collapsing of text and object in the Pilgrim's account. The metonymic quality of the basilicas is less clear in this case than with the cornerstone—they are much larger objects, after all—but his comment that various cities mentioned in the Book of Kings are to be found in that area reinforces the idea that textual reality gives life and personality to the historical terrain around him. The basic fact that Peter was wrong to offer to build tabernacles is insignificant by comparison to the identification of text and object.

The objects the Pilgrim encounters have an impact on him that outstrips his knowledge of the text. Compare his visits to Diocaesarea and Cana:⁵⁰

De Ptolomaida misimus maritimam. Venimus in finibus Galilaeae in civitatem, quae vocatur Diocaesarea, in qua adorabimus, quasi dicentes nobis, a multis canistellum sanctae Mariae. In quo loco erat et chathedra, quando ad eam angelus venit. Deinde milia triae venimus in Chanaan, ubi ad nupnitas fuit Dominus,⁵¹ et accumsimus in ipsum accui, ubi ego indignus nomina parentum meorum scripsi. Ex quibus hydriis due ibi sunt et implebi unam ex ea uino et in collo plena levavi et obtuli ad altare et in ipsa fonte pro benedictionem lavabimus.

From Ptolemaïs we left the coast. We arrived at the border of Galilee, at the city called Diocaesarea, where we venerated, among many things, what they told us was the breadbasket of Saint Mary. In that place also was the chair [on which Mary sat] when the angel came to her. From there we went three miles to Cana, where the Lord was at the wedding, and we reclined on the very couch [that he did]. There I, unworthy as I am, wrote the names of my parents. Two of these water pots remain there, and I filled one of them with wine and lifted it, full, onto my shoulder and I offered it at the altar. We washed in that spring for the sake of a blessing.

Here, in regards to Diocaesarea, the Pilgrim includes an important parenthetical comment: *quasi dicentes nobis*

("as [they] told us"). The "they" is not defined here, and perhaps a passive translation might work better ("as we were told" or "as is claimed"). Either way, the statement provides some distance, a third-party perspective with a glimpse of the local authorities on which the Pilgrim is basing his interpretations. The accoutrements of Mary's daily work of making bread are objects of devotion and worship. The Pilgrim has no compunction about treating these common objects with the reverence he gives to Mary herself.

Similar, but different in effect, is the scene at Cana: he and his companions take turns reclining on the very couch that Jesus reclined on at the wedding in John 2. In a way, this action is reminiscent of how Paula, a companion and patron of Saint Jerome's around 400, treats the slab of rock on which Jesus's body was laid in his tomb. Jerome writes of her: "As if thirsting for waters longed for by faith, [Paula] passionately kissed the very place where the Lord's body had been laid."⁵² Her thirst and her kisses are related to the spiritual importance of the site, and the impulse to taste and touch is primary in her reaction to visiting the Holy Sepulcher. In Paula's case Jerome is able to highlight her level of passion because the sanctity of the object welcomes that response. While there is a naïve immediacy in Paula's reaction that, as Jerome boasts, flaunts the decorum expected of her gender and social station, Paula's action is not so incoherent that literary plausibility is strained. In other words, a natural proportionality is posited between object and response. In the case of the Piacenza Pilgrim's visit to Cana, however, something different is going on. To recline on the same couch that Jesus used seems much more touristic than Paula's approach to the Holy Sepulcher. The action, at least to our modern sensibilities, is theologically out of sync with the object: the Piacenza Pilgrim applies the same tactile approach as Paula, but to a much lesser object (at least in terms of New Testament narrative significance), and one that is, to be frank, more likely to be forged.⁵³ We know from the Pilgrim's own words that he recognized the authority on which such

50 *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 4.1–5 (Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 94).

51 John 2:1–11.

52 *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae* (Ep. 108): Ep. 108.9.2; Cain, *Jerome's Epitaph on Paula* (n. 41 above), 53.

53 Annabel Wharton has emphasized the "religious emotion" evident in Paula's pilgrimage as part of a larger postmodern conceit comparing John Pierpont Morgan's spiritual and intellectual interest in the Holy Land: Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem* (n. 10 above), 42.

attributions rested—*quasi dicentes nobis*—and here, at least, the concept of “conformity” in pilgrimage, as explored by modern anthropologists, may suggest that the on-site guides were modeling this behavior.⁵⁴

So, if both Paula and the Piacenza Pilgrim were potentially following official instructions at these sites, why posit a difference between them? On one hand, we might want to emphasize the evolution of pilgrimage as an industry: perhaps the infrastructure encouraged such tactile interaction, even with regard to the most peripheral objects. We can imagine a carnival barker at each mile marker offering a turn, for a small price, to interact with yet another relic of the Christian imagination. Most of these relics pilgrims presumably never anticipated encountering in the first place. On the other hand, even a commercial interpretation may also coexist with my own reading, which depends heavily on a background of textual knowledge and religious ritual. If, on the most stripped-down reading of the Piacenza Pilgrim’s practices, we assume that he did not know the relevant Scriptures for all of these objects prior to seeing them in the flesh, he nevertheless had the presence of mind to collect the texts into his account and to make the connection between object and text explicit. Thus, there is no point at which he says something like: “The guide showed me a crown of thorns in a box and claimed it was really important but I didn’t catch where he said it came from or why it was special.” Modern theorists might assert that “the sacred geography is relevant only in so much as it illustrates an authoritative text,”⁵⁵ but once the text is attached to the site, the pilgrim can often reveal new, unexpected associations and meanings upon encountering an object, especially when the patterns and forms of Christian pilgrimage were still very fluid.⁵⁶

The pilgrimage narrative is predetermined to be significant, or, to put it better, to produce significance. Each object is anticipated as a sign. The question is, how is the sign related to what is signified? I would argue that the Pilgrim’s scene of reclining on the couch is, as above with the cornerstone, not merely tactile, but a collapsing of the story of Jesus and the wedding at Cana into the couch itself. The object is what

Jesus-at-Cana is, within the Pilgrim’s particular mode of exploration, and it has its uniqueness because of the Pilgrim’s act of associating the relevant text. What is more, the Pilgrim’s action of reclining in the same spot seals the association, a form of authentication.⁵⁷ To put this point in different terms, the Piacenza Pilgrim is participating in a new economy of pilgrimage in late antiquity.⁵⁸ This new economy is both financial and spiritual and is not divorced from the layers of change happening all around him: the institutionalization of the church, the opportunities for travel facilitated by a connected empire, and the (still fluid) patterns of belief with regard to the Christian Holy Land. The elements most striking to us, his seemingly irrelevant associations of text and site, exemplify the process of making sense of his experiences in this new economy.

A final signal in this passage of such layers operating in tandem is the bizarre liturgical ritual he undertakes at the end. The Piacenza Pilgrim selects one of the actual water jars used by Jesus at Cana to turn water into wine, fills one of them with wine (not water), lifts it up, and offers it (*obtulit*) at the altar. He does not say whether he poured it out or just left it there. Pouring it out would appear very pagan to anyone familiar with traditional Roman customs, but perhaps he did. In

57 Here, moreover, the Piacenza Pilgrim puts his seal upon the object-text in an even more poignant way: he inscribes the names of his parents on the object itself (or close by—all he says is *dum*, not *in quo* or *ad quem*; though other manuscripts have *ubi* instead of *dum*). At the 2014 meeting of the North American Patristics Society, Blake Leyerle interpreted the Piacenza Pilgrim’s act of inscribing this graffito as the very *telos* of pilgrimage itself. According to her paper (unpublished), pilgrimage graffiti, of which a significant corpus survives from this period, were the goal or the culmination of the pilgrimage, and not just a circumstantial by-product of the pilgrim’s visit. However, I would argue that the use of *indignus* in this passage probably carries more weight than she gives it. The Piacenza Pilgrim declines to write his own name and writes that of his parents instead. Why would it matter that his parents’ names are inscribed on the couch in Cana if they had never been there themselves and presumably would never see it in person? If the inscription is the performance of pilgrimage, then his invocation of his parents reinforces the *indignus*, and seems perhaps critical of those who would consider themselves *digni*. Again, it serves as a votive, but it is also a way for this *indignus* observer to recuse himself from the pattern of other pilgrims and to criticize the typical use of peoples’ first names: “Antonius was here!”

58 On the concept of an economy of the miraculous, with connections to Christian pilgrimage in both practice and theory, see D. Caner, “Towards a Miraculous Economy: Christian Gifts and Material ‘Blessings’ in Late Antiquity,” *JEChSt* 14 (2006): 329–33.

54 Eade and Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred* (n. 10 above), 11.

55 Ibid., 9.

56 On objects encouraging unexpected associations and actions, see Peers, “Transfiguring Materialities” (n. 29 above), 116–37.

any case, he and his entourage then wash in the spring there. Both water and wine are present in this visit, but in reverse order from the miracle at Cana.⁵⁹ These two acts seem to be sacramental, or to have their roots in sacramental observance: the wine at the altar presumably having some reference to the Eucharist, and washing in the spring presumably some kind of reference to Baptism. Did the guides tell him to do these two things? Surely a responsible priest at Cana would disabuse him of these strange practices?

The Pilgrim closes Cana by saying they washed in the spring *pro benedictione*. The Latin word *benedictio* does not refer to a spoken benediction, as at the end of a standard church service today. Instead, it usually means, for late antique pilgrims, some kind of spiritual token or trinket that they take away from the site—a souvenir.⁶⁰ Often they might be able to receive a benediction without clerical involvement.⁶¹ There are other examples of similar *benedictiones* in the text, some of which are blessings like this, but others are contact relics like water or oil in ampullae, as in the account of his visit to the Holy Sepulcher:⁶²

Osculantes proni in terra ingressi sumus in sanctam civitatem, in qua adorantes munimentum Domini. Quia monumento de petra est naturalem excisus est, ubi corpus Domini Iesu Christi positum fuit. Lucerna erea, que in tempore ad capud ipsius posita fuit, et ibi ardet die noctuque, ex qua benedictionem tullimus et

reconposuimus ea. In quo monumentum deforis terra mittitur et ingredientes exinde benedictione tollent.

Kissing the earth facedown on the ground, we entered into the Holy City, where we venerated the Lord's tomb. This tomb, where the Lord's body was placed, is cut out of the living rock. A bronze oil-lamp, which had been placed at that time at his head, burns there day and night. From it we took a blessing and we put it back in its place. Earth is brought into the tomb from outside, and [some] when they go in take it away as a blessing.

From the very entrance of the Pilgrim into Jerusalem, his use of *osculantes* and *ingredior*, signaling deliberate, reverential movement, reinforces the idea of city as sacred territory.⁶³ He and his companions take a benedictio from the oil lamp in the Sepulcher. It is unclear whether this was done on his own initiative, but in the end he replaces it out of respect for fellow pilgrims. Others, he notes, take soil away that has been brought in from the outside: it is likewise unclear whether those who take the benedictio have brought the soil in for themselves, or whether it is brought in by the priests or guides and then taken away as a souvenir. Either way it seems the Piacenza Pilgrim sticks to the oil alone, which he probably took away in some kind of ampulla, of the type well known from across the Mediterranean.⁶⁴

Another passage with a benedictio where the Piacenza Pilgrim seems to distinguish himself from other pilgrims is the following:⁶⁵

59 Another option is that the Piacenza Pilgrim puts these actions into a chiasmic structure in relation to the Gospel narrative (water : wine :: wine : water). These acts at Cana may also be a way of giving a sense of time to a narrative that has been, in terms of his experience, collapsed into a single location. On pilgrimage as a way of reenacting biblical narrative in real time, see G. Frank, "Pilgrimage," in Harvey and Hunter, *Oxford Handbook* (n. 25 above), 829.

60 These are common in Greek and Syriac texts as well: *eulogiai*, *barake*. Here, though, it is not just a souvenir, but the experience of bathing in the spring itself. See Caner, "Towards a Miraculous Economy"; and G. Frank, "Loca Sancta Souvenirs and the Art of Memory," in *Pèlerinages et lieux saints dans l'antiquité et le moyen âge: Mélanges offerts à Pierre Maraval*, ed. B. Caseau, J.-C. Cheynet, and V. Déroche (Paris, 2006), 193–201.

61 This entire passage seems maverick to me, as if he knows the lingo but is not content with what other pilgrims might be doing at the same site. He wants something more.

62 *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 18.1–3 (Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 142).

63 Instead of *osculantes* other manuscripts have *clinantes*, which is a calque from Greek, forming an otherwise unattested Latin participle; cf. *clinati*.

64 G. Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC, 2010); J.-P. Sordini, "La terre des semelles: Images pieuses ramenées par les pèlerins des Lieux saints (Terre sainte, Martyria d'Orient)," *JSav* (January–June 2011): 77–140; B. Bagatti, "Eulogiae palestinae," *OCP* 15 (1949): 126–66; D. Barag, "Glass Pilgrim Vessels from Jerusalem," *Journal of Glass Studies* 12 (1970): 35–63; D. Barag and J. Wilkinson, "The Monza-Bobbio Flasks and the Holy Sepulchre," *Levant* 6 (1974): 179–87.

65 *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 39.1–2 (Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 210).

Inter Sina et Choreph est uallis, in qua certis temporibus descendit ros de caelo, quae manna appellant, et coaculatur et fit tamquam granum masticis et collegitur, et doleos exinde plenas habent in monasterio, unde et benedictionem dant ampullas modicas. Nam et nobis inde dederunt sextaria V. Ex quo etiam pro condito bibent et nobis dederunt et bibemus.

Between [Mount] Sinai and [Mount] Horeb is a valley, where at certain times dew descends from the sky. They call this manna. It congeals and becomes like a morsel of gum and is collected.⁶⁶ They have casks full of it in the monastery and they offer small ampullae of it as a blessing. To us, they gave five measures. They also drink this as a liqueur and they gave it to us and we drank.⁶⁷

The Piacenza Pilgrim says the monks considered the manna a “blessing.” But this is not the manner in which the Piacenza Pilgrim receives the manna; for him it is a foodstuff, in this case perhaps even a liqueur. He takes more than a mere dram of it as a souvenir, and, as if at a wine tasting, he gets to sample the product before he takes it away. The Old Testament referent is seemingly of no value to him here: Scripture fails to offer a framework for his encounter with manna among the Sinai monks.

Using miraculous objects from the Holy Land for quotidian sustenance shows up also in the following passage:⁶⁸

Nam et ibi est illa spungia et canna, de quibus legitur in euangelio,⁶⁹ de qua spungia aqua bibimus, et calix onichenus, quem benedixit in caena, et aliae multae uirtutes.

For in that place are also the sponge and the reed, about which one reads in the Gospel. From this sponge we drank water. There too is the onyx cup, which [Jesus] blessed at the [Last] Supper, and many other miracles.

The sponge filled with vinegar which was offered to Jesus on the cross is employed by the Piacenza Pilgrim for water. He does not say if this was just out of thirst or “for the sake of a blessing,” in his usual phrase. Either way it seems remarkable that this object, which certainly plays a more prominent role in the Gospels than, say, the couch at Cana, was being used in such an apparently quotidian manner. One might even be bold enough to say that, for a reader familiar with the Gospels, the scene has a semicomical feel (especially in the context of other such scenes).⁷⁰

Finally, I would like to turn to one of the most famous passages from this text, which takes place in the Sinai section, and which has obvious liturgical overtones.⁷¹

Mons Sina petrosus raro terram habet. In quo per circuli cellulas multorum seruorum Dei et in Choreph similiter et dicunt esse Coreph terra munda. Et in ipso monte in parte montis habent idolum suum positum Sarraceni, marmoreum, candidum tam quam nix. In quo etiam permanet sacerdos eorum indutus dalmatica et pallium lineum. Quando etiam venit tempus festivitatis ipsorum praecurrente luna, antequam egrediatur luna, ad diem festum ipsorum incipit colorem mutare marmor illa; mox luna introierit, quando ceperint adorare, fornigra marmor illa tamquam picem. Completo tempore revertitur iterum in pristinam colorem. Unde omnino omnes mirati sumus.

66 It is worth remembering that there was a new, monumental monastery at Sinai from the time of Justinian—less than forty years old at the time of the Piacenza Pilgrim—a monastery which of course still stands today.

67 For the translation “as a liqueur,” see J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, rev. ed. (Warminster, 2002), 147.

68 *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 20.8 (Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 152).

69 Matt. 27:48; Mark 15:36; John 19:29.

70 Consider a similar passage, in which the Pilgrim drinks water from a sacred object on Mount Sion (*Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 22.12 [Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 160]): “Vidi testa de homine inclausa in locello aurum ex gemmis, quem dicunt quia de sancta martyra Theodote esset, in qua multi pro benedictione bibunt et ego bibi.” = “[Also on Mt. Sion] I saw a person’s skull enclosed in a little golden chest [decorated] with precious stones. They say this skull is that of the holy martyr Theodora. Many drink from the skull for the sake of a blessing, and I drank as well.”

71 *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 38.1–5 (Milani, *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini*, 208).

In truth Mount Sinai is rocky, and has hardly any [arable] land. And around its circumference are many cells for the servants of God, as is also the case on [Mount] Horeb. And on one part of this latter mountain the Saracens have placed their own marble idol, which is as white as snow. Their priest also lives there, clothed in a woolen undergarment and a linen mantle. And when the time comes for their festival, during the New Moon, before it rises on their festal day this marble starts to change its color. As soon as the moon rises, when they begin to venerate the idol, this marble becomes as black as pitch. When the time of the festival has finished it changes back again to its original color. We all marveled exceedingly at this.

This is one liturgical moment in the Piacenza Pilgrim's account where he does not participate in what he describes. After noting the ring of monastic cells around the mountain—guarding its peak like a citadel wall—he describes the periodic worship of the "Saracens." Given the date of the text, obviously this cannot mean the Muslims, but presumably a bedouin tribe from the region without specific ethnic connotations.⁷² Although he does not participate in their worship of the marble object, the Pilgrim marvels at them, signaling an awareness of the similarity of his own reverence of the objects of Jesus's life with the Saracens' reverence for this object. Not presuming to trace roots of Islamic aniconism here (as if this were a precursor of the Black Stone in the Kaaba), I note only that the Piacenza Pilgrim does not attempt to interpret the Saracens' aniconism and only describes what he saw. The stone remains mute and prone in the Pilgrim's visual framing, but it is also mute in the sense that the Pilgrim refuses to moralize on it. I emphasize this in order to signal the Pilgrim's attention to worship space and liturgical practice, even in this case the cycle of festivals that the Saracens observe. The change in color of the marble may or may not be significant, but clearly either the festival or the reverence imbues the object with power it does not possess independently.

72 On this designation in late antique Sinai, see now W. D. Ward, *The Mirage of the Saracen: Christians and Nomads in the Sinai Peninsula in Late Antiquity*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage (Oakland, 2015).

The Piacenza Pilgrim treats this as a natural wonder and appears, here at least, more in the guise of an ethnographer. Nevertheless, his interests and emphases are apparent even when he is discussing a religious performance that is clearly foreign to him. One gets the sense again—and dramatically in this case—that the technology of Scripture has failed to help him interpret this marvel, to the degree that he simply maintains a respectful (and uncharacteristic!) silence.



I hope to have shown in this article that, in the late sixth century, Christian pilgrims could have a remarkable range of experiences in the Holy Land. Through the lens of the Piacenza Pilgrim's account of his own pilgrimage, we see the fluidity of late antique experience and interpretation clearly on display. I am reluctant to say the Piacenza Pilgrim was idiosyncratic because that implies there was a "normal" behavior among Christian pilgrims in this period. We have too few accounts to know what "normal" was, or if there was a typical experience of pilgrimage at all. While it is true that certain routes, sites, and objects were established by this time and that the infrastructure of tourism was robust, such norms could still be subverted. In other words, I would argue that the development of Christian pilgrimage is not a foregone conclusion: it is a historical phenomenon—or set of phenomena—made all the more intriguing by this fascinating text.

The Piacenza Pilgrim was not the bumbling simpleton he is sometimes made out to be. He believed what he saw and tried to participate in local worship in ways that were at that time, from the point of view of liturgiology, remarkably eccentric. I have called his liturgical and exegetical observations "irrelevancies" only as a way of signaling the importance of the processes he reveals, challenging our own expectations of the historical development of pilgrimage. The strangest and most basic element in his matrix of interpretation is the marked literalism with which he treats the objects he encounters.

Drawing on the recent work of Byzantine art historian Glenn Peers, I would even say that he animates these objects and gives them a being and a personality, which is a striking move in comparison with other pilgrimage texts. Peers argues that Byzantine objects should really be labeled as "quasi-objects" (or

semi-discrete entities) because they participate vividly in a shared materiality.⁷³ Their distinctive relational nature allows us to view individuals, texts, and images as part of a continuum. In particular, the distance between viewer or text and the object described often collapses, and the roles of subject and object frequently trade places.⁷⁴

In an influential postcolonial interpretation of the Piacenza Pilgrim from his book *The Remains of the Jews*, Andrew Jacobs claims boldly that the Piacenza Pilgrim “aestheticizes” the Jewish present into something both safely “past” and also subject to colonization by imperial Christianity.⁷⁵ As should be clear from the handful of passages I have adduced in this article, the Piacenza Pilgrim, if anything, is tactile and sensory, and, as far as it goes, Jacobs’s emphasis is surely accurate. But I would argue that even more fundamental than the Pilgrim’s aestheticizing tendencies are the seemingly idiosyncratic manipulations he performs upon the biblical text relevant to a given site, in order to bring to life his intense encounters with the objects themselves. The objects come alive as instantiations of the text. His collapsing of the text into the object, at a cognitive level, is fascinating and, I would argue, transcends the merely sensory.⁷⁶

73 G. Peers, “Object Relations: Theorizing the Late Antique Viewer,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. S. F. Johnson (Oxford, 2012), 970–93; idem, “Real Living Painting: Quasi-Objects and Dividuation in the Byzantine World,” *Religion and the Arts* 16 (2012): 433–60; idem, ed., *Byzantine Things in the World* (Houston, 2013); idem, “Transfiguring Materialities.”

74 I recognize also that Peers’s theoretical formulations fall within a larger discussion in art historical circles about “Thing Theory,” which I do not presume to have fully digested or to be participating in. I hope only to gesture to the value of these ideas for the literary history of late antiquity. For a reflection on the difficulty objects cause the historian of late antiquity, see J. Elsner, “Objects and History,” in *Cultural Histories of the Material World*, ed. P. N. Miller (Ann Arbor, 2013), 165–71; and L. Lavan, E. Swift, and T. Putzeys, eds., *Objects in Context, Objects in Use: Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity*, *Late Antique Archaeology* 5 (Leiden, 2007).

75 A. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity*, *Divinations* (Stanford, 2004). For a complementary way of reading the aesthetics of pilgrimage through rhetoric, see R. Webb, “The Aesthetics of Sacred Space: Narrative, Metaphor, and Motion in *Ekphrasis* of Church Buildings,” *DOP* 53 (1999): 59–74.

76 It also attests to the malleability of the stories being told on site in various worship contexts: a kind of multiform liturgical exegesis based on texts, objects, and habits of thought. See D. Krueger,

My analogy between pilgrimage accounts and early Christian apocryphal literature emphasizes how both expand specific biblical texts, even just one or two words, into entire narrative worlds that stimulated the imaginations of late antique readers. For example, in the *Protoevangelion of James*, when Salome, doubting the virginal birth of Jesus, tests the state of Mary’s postpartum virginity with her own finger, she finds that her hand has burnt up as in a fire.⁷⁷ When she repents of her action, she is offered healing only by touching the baby Jesus with her shriveled hand. The Gospel narrative is merely the jumping-off point for a very different type of story. We can see clearly an aesthetic point in the raw physicality of the act and, as a consequence, her immediate physical punishment for violating a divine sanction—not unlike the biblical story of Uzzah touching the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6). There is a proportionality between her brazen act, the punishment, and the miraculous healing, which are all linked to the mystery of the Incarnation.

In one way or another, the Piacenza Pilgrim, if we let his misreadings speak for themselves, sets up an object–text correspondence that reveals, in rather creative ways, how he himself (as an outsider from Italy) is processing object encounters more alive to him than Scripture. The texts he cites derive from a shared socio-cultural repertoire, but they are enacted through what I called above a new economy of pilgrimage in the late antique Holy Land.⁷⁸ His remarkable identification of “the stone the builders rejected” may very well have been the line he was being fed by guides on site, but it does not show up in any other surviving pilgrimage text that I know of, and in this it is unlike other

“The Unbounded Body in the Age of Liturgical Reproduction,” *JEChrSt* 17 (2009): 267–79; idem, “The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium,” in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. M. Bagnoli et al. (Baltimore, 2010), 5–17; and idem, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium*, *Divinations* (Philadelphia, 2014).

77 *Protoevangelion of James* 20 (Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 65).

78 For similar operations among Jewish writers of late antiquity, see C. Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, *Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum* 144 (Tübingen, 2011). For a related study of western medieval “microspatial” thinking, see D. Harrison, *Medieval Space: The Extent of Microspatial Knowledge in Western Europe during the Middle Ages*, *Lund Studies in International History* 34 (Lund, 1996).

interpretations of sites which are repeated so frequently in these texts that we can almost hear the tour guide explaining to the pilgrims what they are supposed to be seeing. More compelling to me is the way in which this Pilgrim—his naïveté is truly beside the point—was able to free-associate on the spot a textual memory that was already established in its relation to the site. In the process of revealing his own cognitive action of forging the text–object relationship he has misinterpreted a biblical text, and possibly also a ritual on site, in a creative and meaningful way, and has taken the (belated) opportunity to wax polemical about the Jews. In this collapsed space-time, it hardly matters which came first, the text

or the object, since the object has, for him, become the text itself. That bizarre, metonymic representation with which I began—of the literal cornerstone of Mount Sion silencing the murmuring of the displaced Jews in late antiquity—embodies and objectifies the memory of the biblical past in the very fabric of the Christian Holy Land.

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